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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 001767

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [SO](#) [UK](#)  
SUBJECT: SOMALIA: LONDON-BASED ARS CHAIR SAYS ARS READY TO  
MEDITATE BETWEEN TFG AND HISBUL ISLAM/SHABAAB

REF: NAIROBI 810

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin Quinville, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary. Acting Chair of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) Zakaria Abdi told Poloff July 31 that ARS is ready to mediate between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Hisbul Islam and al-Shabaab. Abdi claimed the TFG's Sheikh Sharif left the ARS because ARS was "too secular," while Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys left ARS to lead Hisbul Islam (HI) and work with al-Shabaab because the two differed on the means through which to achieve progress in Somalia: ARS through political action, and HI through violence. Aweys' goal was to unite HI and al-Shabaab, but he has not gained support from all al-Shabaab leadership. Abdi predicted a split in al-Shabaab, with the moderates joining Aweys' HI and the hard-line becoming more militant and associating more with al-Qaeda (AQ). Abdi's description of his and the ARS's relationship with Aweys and HI portrayed ARS as pursuing, politically, the same goals as HI (and Aweys) push for militarily, indicating a possible linkage between the two groups. However, his suggestion that the ARS was in a position to facilitate talks between the TFG and HI/al-Shabaab likely overestimates the ARS's clout with the TFG and al-Shabaab. End summary.

Zakaria Abdi: Acting ARS Chair  
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12. (C) In July 31 discussions after meeting after a think tank event, London-based Acting Chair of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) Zakaria Abdi (AKA Haji-Abdi) outlined the ARS's relations with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Sheikh Sharif, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys' Hisbul Islam (HI), and al-Shabaab. Abdi, claiming to be the Acting Chair of the entire ARS network, has been based in the UK for the past 17 years and is a former parliamentarian and minister in both the first TFG and the Transitional National Government (TNG). He opposes the USG's support of the TFG, which he sees as a proxy for the Ethiopian Government, and purports to advocate for a political - not violent - process to restore Somalia's stability under a locally legitimate government.

ARS: Relations with the TFG, HI, and al-Shabaab  
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13. (C) Abdi described the ARS as a political, not military, group that opposes "Sheikh Sharif's TFG," which, he claims, is seen as illegitimate by everyone except for the international community and UN. Abdi said ARS opposes Sheikh Sharif, a former ally who left the ARS for being "too secular," because he is a proxy for Ethiopian political intervention in Somalia and commands no support amongst Somalis. However, while the ARS continues to oppose the TFG, they occasionally have contact with one another (NFI), Abdi

added.

¶4. (C) Turning to Hisbul Islam, Abdi claimed Aweys left the ARS because Aweys supported military action and a relationship with al-Shabaab to oppose the TFG, which ultimately led to his return to Somalia from Asmara and his leadership of HI (reftel). Aweys' goal was to unite HI and al-Shabaab to defeat the TFG. Abdi said he maintains very frequent contact with Aweys, as the two agree on political goals - removing the TFG, liberating Somalia from Ethiopian intervention, etc. They disagree, however, on the means to bring about change. ARS supports change through a political process; HI, though violence. Abdi said that sanctions pushed Aweys to pursue violent action and described Aweys as "furious" at the USG for supporting the sanctions.

¶5. (C) Noting that ARS and al-Shabaab used to be allies in the fight against the Ethiopian military, Abdi said HI's relationship with al-Shabaab is a marriage of convenience and that the ARS is not convinced that al-Shabaab is part of al-Qaeda (AQ). He described al-Shabaab as a once moderate organization pushed to Islamic extremism by sanctions. Abdi conceded that al-Shabaab has members who train with AQ, but said that no official relationship exists between the two organizations. He said that he had twice been contacted by al-Shabaab about becoming the organization's foreign spokesperson, but refused because he does not share al-Shabaab's Islamic values. Abdi predicted that al-Shabaab would eventually split because moderate members of the organization support Aweys while more hard-line members want a stronger linkage with AQ (which Aweys does not support).

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#### ARS as the Facilitator

¶6. (C) Abdi said the ARS was ready to serve a facilitator of discussions between the TFG and HI/al-Shabaab; the two groups needed political reconciliation because they are at a military stalemate. He claimed he did not seek USG backing for legitimacy (as the TFG had) but simply for support. He was confident that the TFG and HI are ready to talk, but thought al-Shabaab needed convincing. (Its craving for international recognition could be exploited.) He suggested separate talks in an Arab state with each of the groups, possibly in Qatar, followed by joint talks in Somalia, possibly in Hargeisa or Puntland. He argued that the Egyptian reconciliation initiative would fail because no Somalis trust the Egyptians after their collusion with the Ethiopians.

#### Comment

¶7. (C) Abdi's description of his and the ARS's relationship with Aweys and HI portrayed ARS as pursuing, politically, the same goals as HI (and Aweys) push for militarily, indicating a possible linkage between the two groups. He openly acknowledged that both he and Aweys are still considered part of the "Asmara Group." However, his suggestion that the ARS was in a position to facilitate talks between the TFG and HI/al-Shabaab likely overestimates the ARS's clout with the TFG and al-Shabaab. End comment.

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